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FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3310  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 000322

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/04/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EUN](#) [FI](#)  
SUBJECT: FINLAND CALLS FOR UNIFIED EU RESPONSE TO ESTONIAN  
BRONZE SOLDIER CRISIS

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREGORY THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The escalating dispute between Russia and Estonia over the Bronze Soldier has prompted an unusually strong criticism of Russia's behavior from senior Finnish officials, who are typically known for their caution in dealing with Russia. The President and the FM have issued strong statements of solidarity, punctuated by the latter's trip to Tallinn on May 2. The Russian Embassy in Helsinki has used the dispute not only to augment the chill in Russian-Estonian -- and, indirectly, Russian-EU -- relations, but also to issue yet another veiled warning against any Finnish move toward NATO membership. End Summary.

#### UNUSUALLY STRONG FINNISH RESPONSE

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12. (SBU) Given the close geographical, political and cultural ties between Estonia and Finland, the controversy over the moving of the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn has caused considerable consternation here. The escalating controversy and Russia's heavy-handed responses in Moscow, Tallinn and internationally have dominated the Finnish press for days. Senior Finnish officials -- infamous for their caution and discretion in commenting on Russian political behavior -- have also responded with unusually outspoken public shows of support for Estonia and censure of Moscow's response.

13. (SBU) President Tarja Halonen called on Russia to de-escalate the crisis and demanded it take steps to protect Estonian diplomats. Saying she was "shaken" by the crisis, she made it her top agenda item for her May 3 meetings with German President Merkel. New FM Ilkka Kanerva traveled to Estonia May 2 to show solidarity with the Estonian Government. He called for joint EU "action in support of Estonia" and a common EU policy line regarding Russia's actions. Kanerva also demanded that Moscow honor its Vienna Convention obligations regarding Estonian diplomats. Oddly, the only senior Finnish official who maintained the usual cautious Finnish line on Russia was PM Matti Vanhanen. The PM said that EU countries including Finland "should not intervene" in what he characterized as a bilateral issues, adding that "the Estonians are capable of handling the unrest themselves." (Vanhanen subsequently faced tough questions in Parliament for his timid response.) A senior advisor to the FM told us privately that some EU member states have taken a decidedly more cautious stance than Finland and some others have called for unified EU action in response to the crisis. It is currently unclear, he added, how EU countries will line up in response to Estonia's threat to boycott the upcoming EU-Russia Summit.

HELSINKI-BASED RUSSIANS FAN THE FLAMES

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14. (U) The Russian Embassy in Helsinki wasted no time in adding to Finnish consternation over the crisis. Russian Ambassador Alexander Rumyantsev called the moving of the Bronze Soldier a "mockery and an insult," and stated flatly that it will harm Russia-Estonia and Russia-EU relations. He also used the same press event to issue yet another veiled warning to Finland, saying that while Finland's joining NATO is its own decision, doing so would affect Russia-Finnish relations negatively.

15. (C) Our contacts at the Finnish MFA and within the Helsinki diplomatic corps have expressed concern over the local Russian Embassy's erratic and counter-productive behavior. A long-planned trip to Moscow for resident military attaches, sponsored by the Russian DAO, has been jeopardized following the Russians' decision to return the Estonian Army attache's visa application with his money, pointedly recommending that he not pursue a visa request. The Estonian Embassy has suffered some very minor vandalism by unknown authors, and Finnish security has visibly increased its presence (which happens to be next door to the US Embassy). The Estonian Embassy expressed appreciation for statements of support from Washington, and the Finnish Prime Minister's chief of staff called Ambassador Ware to express thanks for Secretary Rice's helpful comments regarding the crisis.

COMMENT

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16. (C) The uncharacteristically strong Finnish show of solidarity with Estonia is clearly a signal from the new government of its intent to bolster Tallinn, one of its closest regional and EU partners. However, it also

results in increasing concerns here regarding the series of worrisome signs that continue to emerge from Russia. Given the Finns' longstanding preference for addressing tough issues with Russia behind closed doors, it is a welcome sign to see Finland showing leadership in calling for a tougher EU response on behalf of its neighbor.

WARE